



**SUPPORTING A STRONGER
CIVIL SOCIETY:
A CONSULTATION RESPONSE
BY BRAP**

JANUARY 2011

A. Introduction

1. brap welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals contained in *Supporting a stronger civil society*.
2. brap is a think fair tank, inspiring and leading change to make public, private and civil sector organisations fit for the needs of a more diverse society. brap offers tailored, progressive and common sense approaches to equality training, consultancy and community engagement issues.
3. brap has ten years' experience delivering infrastructure support to black and minority ethnic (BME) civil society organisations. Enclosed are some examples of the support we have provided to local organisations through a project called Routes 2 Opportunity. As the Cabinet Office can see, the support brap offers covers a range of areas from bid writing and governance development to marketing and strategic planning.
4. In this response, we would like to focus on the impact the proposals may have on BME civil society organisations. In particular the response will comment on:
 - diversifying sources of support (question 3)
 - direct support to frontline organisations (questions 4-5)It finishes with some general comments about how the Cabinet Office may use this period of change as an opportunity to embed fairness into the delivery of infrastructure support.
5. The Cabinet Office is no doubt familiar with BME organisations' role and functioning within civil society, but for more information – including definitions and a brief overview – please see *The Pied Piper*, available at www.brap.org.uk/content/view/324/123/

B. The role of public and private organisations in infrastructure provision

6. The Cabinet Office has stated its intention to encourage greater transfer of expertise from the private and public sectors to civil society.

Presumptions of expertise

7. In our experience, private organisations have two features which give them a competitive advantage when competing for contracts and delivering services:
 - since many private organisations involved with procurement solutions have large reserves they are at greater liberty to take risks in innovation, knowing that they are able to absorb potential losses
 - again, the size of many private organisations create internal economies of scale which permit the delivery of services at a lower per unit rate

Notwithstanding these advantages, the private sector still often employs civil society organisations to deliver key services given their unique skills and expertise (such as local geographic and demographic knowledge; responsiveness to community concerns; and flexibility in approach and delivery, amongst others).

8. Should the Cabinet Office pursue greater collaboration between the private sector and civil society, therefore, it should recognise that the skills the private sector can offer are

sometimes substantially different from the skills civil society organisations actually need. Furthermore, the advice offered by private organisations needs to be cognisant of the structural financial differences between the two types of organisation and what this means in terms of civil society organisations' capacity to implement change.

Skills required to deliver effective support

9. In 2008, brap conducted research into the features of effective business support for BME social businesses.¹ The research identified five important skills or competencies individual support providers need to deliver guidance in a responsive and approachable manner. These are listed below:

- **flexible working practices** – BME civil society organisations often differ dramatically from private sector organisations and larger civil society organisations with regard to the level of organisational infrastructure in place. As such, outside agencies may find it initially challenging to connect into civil society organisations at an appropriate level. For example, an organisation able to help develop a sophisticated understanding of human resources legislation and best practice may be confronted with an organisation that doesn't have the capacity for a HR function. Research shows that many external 'consultants' find this disorientating. As such a key skill is the ability to work flexibly, experiment with new approaches, and thrive in 'unusual' situations
- **understanding the big picture** – BME civil society organisations do not operate on a level playing field within the commissioning marketplace. Hamstrung by a legacy of under-development, many BME organisations lack the skills associated with successful procurement, such as bid and tender writing competencies, scoping of the funding environment, and impact measurement and dissemination. Effective support not only needs to understand this, but understand the reasons this knowledge deficit exists (in particular the way the BME sector has been shaped by successive government policy). Furthermore, external support providers must be familiar with the relevant developments in the political and funding environment the BME sector operates within and have the ability to translate this into practical actions for the client
- **consistency and constancy** – given the legacy of under-development within the sector, BME civil society organisations are often in need of prolonged, substantive development. This may require a significant investment of time on behalf of the external support provider. The Cabinet Office may wish to think seriously about how it incentivises support from outside agencies to ensure sustainable support of this type.
- **communication** – our research has found that communication skills are vital for infrastructure support providers. This is not necessarily – or even primarily – about being able to explain information accessibly. Rather it is connected with 'soft' skills such as being empathetic and supportive. Identifying substantive challenges within an organisation requires support providers to actively listen to clients and pick up on subtle hints and clues. Communication is an important skill, and one that not everyone possesses.
- **treating people as people** – traditional equalities practice has focused on identifying people's needs based on their group identity (e.g. woman, African Caribbean). As valuable as this approach is, it also has a number of problems. For example, it can ignore the fact that within groups people's experiences and values can vary immensely. It can also encourage a resort to solutions based on people's perceived cultural needs,

¹ brap (2009) *Locating the edge*. Available at www.brap.org.uk

which can have the adverse effect of solidifying stereotypes and negative perceptions. These problems have been acknowledged by the Minister for Equality² and it is important that business support providers are aware of them too. Treating people fairly is a skill: it means more than simply being nice to people, or learning ‘facts’ about their religion or the food they eat. From our research it emerged that an important quality for business support providers to have is the capacity to question their values and assumptions, and recognise that unfairness is often built into the way structures and institutions are designed.

10. Given the scope and depth of these competencies, the Cabinet Office should provide training to support providers who share their expertise with BME civil society to ensure the support they deliver is effective. Not providing support that is responsive to the needs of BME civil society organisations – or, indeed, other ‘single identity’ groups – could seriously hinder their development and restrict their potential to contribute to the Big Society’s aims. Furthermore, the provision of accredited training could act as an incentive to encourage pro bono volunteers. brap has developed (in partnership with NCVO) a tried and tested programme to help support providers deliver more effective support to BME civil society organisations. The programme called ‘Beyond Survival’ has trained 25 support providers to improve their infrastructure provision (with over 100 BME frontline organisations receiving better support as a result in the first year).
11. The administration of appropriate training should be seen within the context of a kitemark for infrastructure support providers, discussed more fully in section D.

C. Direct support for frontline organisations

12. The Cabinet Office has stated its intention to use bursaries as a mechanism to help organisations access support that is appropriate and relevant.

The diagnostic process

13. As empowering as bursaries are as a means of accessing support, it is worth noting that they can underestimate the importance of the diagnostic process and the opportunity this can give organisations to think critically about the skills they need to navigate social, political, and economic change. As an infrastructure organisation itself, brap is aware of and can evidence the need to establish a critical friend relationship with frontline organisations. This is particularly true for many BME civil society organisations who often lack the time and space to think strategically about their direction, function, and positioning within the marketplace because they spend most of their resources on delivery.

Support requirements

14. In question 4, the Cabinet Office asks what support organisations may need to become more resilient. Based on our research, brap would suggest the following three areas:
 - **income generation:** the move from grant funding to commissioning caught many organisations by surprise. New developments in the funding environment such as

² Theresa May, ‘Equality strategy speech’ delivered on 17 November 2010. Available at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/speeches/equality-vision

payment by results (and associated payment mechanisms such as Social Impact Bonds) have the potential to create similar confusion within the sector unless the lessons are learnt from the previous transitional phase. In part, this will involve providing greater support to meet new bureaucratic requirements associated with these funding models, as well as ensuring robust support still exists around bid and tender writing skills

- **business models:** connected with the above, many organisations may have to rethink their business model to reposition themselves as mutuals, co-operatives, or social enterprises. Evidence suggests that support in this area is still patchy,³ but is particularly important to small organisations looking to ensure their operational model is the most appropriate to the funding climate.
- **partnership working:** brap has long since advocated the benefits of civil sector partnership working (indeed, we offer a brokerage service for our clients in the sector) and this will no doubt become increasingly important. However, collaborative and cluster working do have problems, such as the dilution of organisations' missions as they become subsumed within larger consortia; the inability of such consortia to attract new members due to a lack of resources; and the creation of robust partnership contracts with proper financial and legal considerations. The Cabinet Office should provide support in all these areas.

Priorities for a bursary fund

15. Many of the priorities we would wish to see in a bursary fund follow on from the issues we have highlighted in paragraph 14.
16. Additionally, however, it is important to recognise that civil society has a role in progressing social justice and equity which goes beyond that of simply providing services in response to commissioning priorities. Civil society organisations have made the greatest impact when acting as agents for social change. This involves working at a strategic level to implement structural changes to services or even changing the political landscape itself, such as raising awareness of issues like domestic violence, child poverty, or homophobic hate crime. It is important that this lobbying role is not lost sight of as greater emphasis is placed on civil society organisations delivering public services. As such, the bursary fund may wish to fund support on advocacy skills.
17. Of course, the Community First Fund and the proposal to create 5,000 community organisers may go some way to ensuring these skills are developed within the sector. However, this support is aimed at helping organisations effect change at a local level. It is not clear that there will be support to develop local delivery/change agents and to ensure issues of equity and diversity are accounted for. Additionally, it is not clear whether community organisers will have a mandate to operate on agendas that include campaigning and advocacy. Implicit within government proposals is the idea that societal contribution is only valued if the contribution responds to deficits in service delivery whereas progressing social justice often requires changing hearts and minds.

³ brap (2008) *Routes 2 Opportunity: Year one learning report*. Available on request.

D. General comments

18. The consolidation of infrastructure provision offers a good opportunity for the Cabinet Office to establish a quality kitemark for support providers. While great strides have been made in this area in recent years, the quality of support available to frontline organisations is still variable.⁴
19. Although it would be beyond the scope of this response to discuss in detail what the content of such a kitemark should be, it may be useful to outline some features a support provider capable of working effectively with BME civil society organisations would have.
20. The left-hand column in table below outlines the skills the kitemark should encourage providers to recognise and gain competence in:

Skills	Why is this important?	Key indicators of understanding
<p>Knowledge of the origins, history and subsequent development of BME civil society, specifically within the context of government policy, immigration and UK race relations</p>	<p>BME civil society organisations require a different type of support to mainstream organisations. However, this is not because BME organisations subscribe to a different set of values or because their ethnicity sets them apart. Instead, the specific support they require is rooted in the way successive governments' policy has shaped the topography of the sector. Support providers must be aware of this history and have the capability to use this information to help organisations plan and respond to social policy drivers</p>	<p>Demonstrate an understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK race relations post-World War II (racism, immigration, key events) • British race relation policies (dominant models and their problems) • the shape and characteristics of BME civil society • future development opportunities for BME organisations
<p>The ability to use relevant information to critically analyse and reflect on the suitability and sustainability of current and future organisational strategies</p>	<p>Changes to the funding and political environment are not infrequent. Support providers should be able to identify how such changes will affect BME organisations and the kinds of support that will subsequently be required.</p> <p>For example, as stated in paragraph 9, the UK's equalities landscape is changing, reflecting a shift away from meeting people's perceived cultural needs to delivering the entitlements we all have as individuals. BME</p>	<p>Demonstrate an ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create sustainable and appropriate strategies (understand the extent to which current public policy will impact on an organisation's strategy, intended beneficiary group and approach to delivering activities) • develop organisational capacity (identify any areas of development that the organisation may find more challenging, especially if it might potentially conflict with organisation's original mission and objectives) • raise awareness of the

⁴ See, for example, Harker and Burkeman (2007) *Building Blocks: Developing second-tier support for frontline groups*; Big Lottery (2010) *Equal support: Do identity-based voluntary and community groups need identity-based organisational development?*

	<p>organisations will be particularly affected by this, as many are established to protect a particular group of people and may now have their funding linked to this community-specific provision. Many organisations may therefore require guidance on diversifying their beneficiary base, which will involve business planning and marketing support amongst other things.</p>	<p>context BME organisations operate in</p>
<p>The ability to recognise both strengths and weaknesses as a support provider, and use client experiences positively to extend own abilities</p>	<p>Key to identifying the assumptions and negative perceptions we have of people is the capacity to reflect on our experiences and ask 'difficult' questions about our values. Client evaluation is invaluable here in helping support providers understand the extent to which providers are being fair and transparent, and not letting their preconceptions of BME organisations hinder their development and growth.</p>	<p>Demonstrate that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the support provider places evaluation at the centre of what they do • the support provider is committed to continuing professional development • the support provider understands how service development responses are both developed and led and is able to evaluate the difference between the two • the provider understands how to deliver on more inclusive design approaches based on the vitalism of service provision

21. brap are already using the above as the foundation for a successful training programme for support providers and commissioners. We are more than happy to discuss this in more detail should the Cabinet Office wish.

E. More information

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Appendix 1

Case studies of BME-responsive infrastructure support



R2O in action



Photo © Alan Swain alough@biscarivats.co.uk

real life case studies

Ready to learn – English language class at Chinese Community Centre – Birmingham

About R2O

brap manages the £1m Routes to Opportunity (R2O) programme. Funded by Advantage West Midlands, the programme is helping to develop and strengthen BME-led third sector organisations so that they can compete more effectively for public sector contracts and become more sustainable.

These short case studies give a flavour of what the programme is helping BME organisations to achieve.

For more information about R2O contact:

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A platform for the Chinese community

Chinese Community Centre – Birmingham

The Chinese Community Centre – Birmingham (CCC-B) has provided a focal point for Birmingham’s Chinese community for over thirty years. Established in 1977, the charity has a turnover of around £250k, employs 8 staff, and has a volunteer force of around 40-50 people. Operating from its extensive community centre in Bradford Street, Birmingham, CCC-B offers advice and advocacy, health promotion (including mental health, an ‘expert patient’ programme and support for carers), interpretation and translation, fitness and cultural activities, a homework club for 7-14-year olds, and training and education (including IT and ESOL classes).

In recent years, however, like many third sector organisations, the charity has found the changing environment in which it operates an increasing challenge. It needs to generate greater levels of independent income and also faces increasing competition in service tendering from major charity ‘brands’.



www.advantagewm.co.uk

Routes to Opportunity is a project funded by Advantage West Midlands and managed by brap to boost black and minority ethnic third sector activity across the West Midlands.



How R₂O helped

Understanding social enterprise – a key area for support

The R₂O business support offer begins with the completion of a specialised 'culturally sensitive' development needs assessment – a diagnostic tool that helps identify the organisation's present circumstances, its future development plans, and key business areas that need strengthening.

Anna Yim, CCC-B's chief executive approached R₂O specifically for support that would help the organisation better understand social enterprise business models. "We are seriously considering setting up a social enterprise trading arm," says Ms Yim, "because we need to generate more income and find new ways of delivering for the community."

R₂O provider iSE devised a package of social enterprise awareness training for the organisation, including advice on legal structures, visits to other social enterprises, an introduction to social accounting and impact assessment, and support with business planning.

Professional, flexible support

"We were very impressed with our advisors," says Ms Yim. "We liked their professionalism, their expertise, and above all their flexibility. They were careful to ensure that we could get the most from the support on offer." A further benefit of the R₂O support has been improved networking and contacts, she says.

Longer-term development support is the key issue

But CCC-B is new to the concept of social enterprise and as a consequence the five days' support available from R₂O could only really serve as a foundation to get the organisation started. "This help certainly improved our understanding of social enterprise," says Ms Yim, "and it also raised our confidence – it's made us determined to give it a try. But we will need more support along the way if we are to succeed." The organisation has approached Business Link West Midlands for longer-term support to help develop the social enterprise idea.

Already moving forward

But the charity is already moving forward with the idea. "We are considering a major health and social care idea," says Ms Yim, "and actively looking for development partners." The organisation has also begun a process of consultation within the Chinese community to gather further feedback about the idea and how best the service package might be shaped. "We are very serious about this," Ms Yim insists, "and would like to see this enterprise established during 2009. We think there's a huge need for health and social care services that are appropriate for the Chinese community – cultural sensitivity and language are key issues, and obviously for us these are core to our expertise."

'Please consider more specialised help'

Ms Yim would like to see R₂O helping to invest in more specialised support for the future. "This support was great and it has really convinced us that we must take forward a new social enterprise for the community. But we do need more than five days' help. One of the main problems for us will be accessing specialist legal advice, especially to help with the legal structure. It would be great if R₂O could find a way to help with this."



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R₂O in action



Pick of the crop – freshly harvested vegetables from the AFB Heritage allotments

real life case studies

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Opening new doors

The AFB Heritage Community Organisation Ltd

The AFB Heritage Community Organisation Ltd (AFB Heritage) is an established charity which has been providing social welfare and community activities in Sparkbrook, Sparkhill and the surrounding areas for over 30 years. Although non-exclusive, the charity caters predominantly for people of African Caribbean origins.

AFB Heritage is the 'charitable arm' of the Assemblies of the First Born Church and has embarked on an ambitious plan to develop and extend its community-based welfare provision, which includes an after school club, youth group, Saturday school, lunch club and allotment gardens.

Central to this is a major rebuilding programme valued at over £650,000 which utilises land adjoining the church in Alfred Street, Sparkbrook.

Over half the money for rebuilding has been raised from personal church donations, with the rest being raised from charitable trusts and loan finance. When complete, in the autumn of 2008, the new building will roughly treble the available space, enabling the organisation to bring all of its community services together on one site.



www.advantagewm.co.uk

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Creating a competitive edge for the BME third sector

How R₂O helped

Key areas for support

The R₂O business support offer begins with the completion of a specialised 'culturally sensitive' development needs assessment – a diagnostic tool that helps identify the organisation's present circumstances, its future development plans, and key business areas that need strengthening.

R₂O provider Foremost Solutions completed the initial diagnostic for AFB Heritage and jointly agreed three main areas of support: assistance with developing a funding strategy and identifying new funding opportunities; identifying an appropriate quality assurance system for the organisation; and registering an internet domain name and developing a basic website which the organisation can develop and update independently.

A step change in thinking

Introduction to PQASSO, the quality assurance scheme developed specifically for voluntary organisations, was, according to the project's chairperson Cherry Brown, a real eye-opener. "We have been used to performance monitoring as part of our Saturday School and other activities," she says, "but R₂O support really raised our consciousness about quality assurance. We now see that it is critical if we are to move further into public sector contract delivery." The organisation is now working independently to achieve level 1 PQASSO accreditation.

A new confidence in fund-raising

R₂O support has also helped the organisation become more confident about diversifying its sources of income. "In the past," says Ms Brown, "we have always avoided EU funding because of its complexities, but working with a business advisor gave us new confidence. With help we were able to complete an application to the Enterprising Communities regeneration programme. If successful, this will help us convert our existing kitchen facilities to commercial standards." The organisation plans to set up a Caribbean Meals on Wheels service operating as a social enterprise. "R₂O has helped us to see that extending

our community services needs to go hand-in-hand with improving income-generation and sustainability," adds Ms Brown.

'Sensitive and enabling'

R₂O support has helped AFB Heritage in four key ways, according to Ms Brown. "It switched us on to performance and quality assurance," she says, "and it motivated and enthused us about the role that public service contracting can play in our future. It raised our awareness of what will be involved as we move towards becoming an employer of paid staff and overall it has sharpened our focus and our practice."

Would the organisation welcome further support from the R₂O programme? "Without question," says Ms Brown. "It was sensitively delivered and enabling. We would certainly benefit from further practical assistance in developing delivery standards, in maximising the use of the new building, and in accessing other funding streams."

AFB Heritage Community
Organisation Ltd
www.afbheritage.org.uk



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R20 in action

real life case studies



Photo © Alan Swen aloughly@sectorsolutions.co.uk

Play time – Community Integration Partnership's 20-place nursery

About R20

brap manages the £1m Routes to Opportunity (R20) programme. Funded by Advantage West Midlands, the programme is helping to develop and strengthen BME-led third sector organisations so that they can compete more effectively for public sector contracts and become more sustainable.

These short case studies give a flavour of what the programme is helping BME organisations to achieve.

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Navigating the future

Community Integration Partnership Ltd

Community Integration Partnership (CIP) began life in 2002 as a one-year, Home Office funded project supporting refugee and new arrival women and their families.

Six years later, operating from its large offices in Edgbaston, the charity provides training and support to new arrival women to help with employment, training, computer literacy, parenting, language skills, and self-confidence. It employs ten staff and has a turnover of around £300,000.

Now, according to Dally Panesar, the charity's founder and now its chief executive, the organisation "...stands at a crossroads."

Diversifying the charity's income is critical, as is identifying new delivery opportunities that can be turned into fundable – or tradeable – services. The organisation needs fresh strategies that will help it navigate its way into the future.



Routes to Opportunity is a project funded by Advantage West Midlands and managed by brap to boost black and minority ethnic third sector activity across the West Midlands.



How R₂O helped

Key areas for support

The R₂O business support offer begins with the completion of a specialised 'culturally sensitive' development needs assessment – a diagnostic tool that helps identify the organisation's present circumstances, its future development plans, and key business areas that need strengthening.

CIP identified business planning as an absolute priority – and in particular an integrated approach to business planning that would promote greater board and staff involvement in the process while also assisting with market analysis, funding and contracting.

Adapting to a changing marketplace

"Our main funding – which to date has always been through the European Refugee Fund – ends in December 2008," explains Ms Panesar, "and consequently income-diversification, including the potential to tender successfully for contracted services, is vital. But the critical thing for me was finding a way to approach this planning that more actively involved my staff and trustees. I wanted a more transparent and inclusive process."

And this is precisely what R₂O was able to offer. Business support provider iSE – "who we already know and trust," adds Ms Panesar – worked closely with the CEO and also facilitated an intensive strategy and planning workshop with the board. "This achieved a massive thing for us," says Ms Panesar. "The Board did have some reservations about utilising outside advice, but the R₂O support overcame this. It showed that with the right provider – with the appropriate skills and expertise – external support really can work. It can be the key ingredient in helping you stand back from the daily operational detail and start to plan for change."

New business plan, new directions

R₂O support has enabled CIP to develop a new business plan and, as part of this, rethink its future direction, service portfolio and funding options. The new

business plan will be completed shortly and presented to the charity's board towards the end of June 2008.

"By late 2009, I think this organisation will probably have changed out of all recognition," says Ms Panesar. Prior to R₂O's support this prospect was a source of considerable anxiety both to staff and trustees, but the organisation is now tangibly more confident about the future. "In fact, there are lots of opportunities for us – but we have to make the time and space to explore them properly," says Ms Panesar.

A learning process

The support was also an important learning process, according to Ms Panesar. "The business planning helped us to work through ideas about how we strengthen and diversify our services while also achieving a better mix of income. It also helped trustees understand more about the business and about the pressures I am sometimes under. They are now able to offer a better balance of operational and strategic support – this has certainly improved my circumstances and I think it has improved theirs too."

The organisation is looking at new arts-based activities – where there are major opportunities and previous pilots have produced strong outcomes for service-users – and broader health and wellbeing provision. It also plans to build up Ikike Women, a small social enterprise it operates to manage its bookings and conference facilities. The social enterprise provides placements and a learning environment for women. "R₂O has been a truly positive experience all round for CIP," says Ms Panesar, "and if resources enabled some follow-up work to be done then frankly we would jump at the chance."



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